who worked in public services, government, journalism, campaign groups or international development and humanitarian aid. I had applied for newspaper trainee schemes and obtained a place at *The Times* which led, two years later, to a staff reporter post. I wasn't fond of the paper's politics nor of its owner, Rupert Murdoch, but it was an extraordinary opportunity. I wanted to change the world, I thought, by being a foreign correspondent and reporting on major stories, and here was an opportunity to begin. But I barely had time to get started on that self-important goal before I burnt out in my mid-twenties with an intense and chronic fatigue that took more than a year to recover from. I was unable to work, and the enforced reflection time led me to follow my emerging values more closely. I worked as a campaigner and researcher at various NGOs for 15 years, and in the middle of that time I lived in Sierra Leone for six months, volunteering for a charity that was supporting children in the aftermath of the civil war.

Two of my key entanglements are already visible in this brief summary. (Others will emerge later.) One is having experienced burnout. It happens a lot among campaigners but the wider culture sets us up for it too. It was incomprehensible while it was happening: a flu-like bug that just didn't lift. I couldn't work. There were many days when I couldn't get out of bed. It took several years after I recovered, and a course of therapy, to understand the personal dynamics in play: how I had been raised and educated to perform and achieve for the sake of performance and achievement. I had no idea how to stop when I was tired. I was incapable of just 'being' without discomfort that I should be 'doing' something. I didn't know how to heed rather than ignore and discredit the voice from within that speaks our real desires. It would take many more years, and witnessing my friends repeatedly burning out as campaigners, to see that I had been participating in a cultural pattern, too; of valuing constant activity, work and achievement. Burnout happens to the people working for the companies that cause ecological destruction, as well as to the people trying to persuade the companies to change their behaviour. The people working to undermine capitalism find themselves working like … well, like people living under capitalism. My previous experience of burnout meant that I could avoid a repeat of the worst outcome. Campaigning never caused me to become so ill that I couldn't work at all, because I had learned the warning signs as a journalist, and stepped back from the

edge in time. I would slow down a bit, take a break, or leave the job I was doing that had become a crushing weight of impossible demands from impossible people. (I had to do this more than once, though I realise now that I would repeatedly take on such jobs.) But several times I came very close to burnout. The underlying pattern, in which I pushed myself in relentless work, had not really changed.

My other entanglement visible here is a materially comfortable, white middle-class life. I want to change economic and political systems that I also benefit from. Imperialist and then globalised economies of extraction have contributed to my material comfort. Whiteness and class privilege have laid down a path relatively free of external obstacles to my progress, and being straight, cis and able-bodied has further smoothed that path. So my background and experiences affect how I do activism, as well as the questions I ask about activism. As mentioned in the introduction, there is turning to activism by challenging and criticising one's community, societal norms and expectations in order to change them (which is what I did when I left journalism to campaign); and there is being radicalised into activism by living a life directly on the receiving end of race, class, gender, sexuality or other oppressions. As intersectional theory shows, people often suffer from a combination of different forms of oppression, and specific problems occur at the points where these oppressions intersect,[10] so there is not always a simple binary between groups of activists who are 'oppressed' and activists who are 'not oppressed'. Similar dynamics tend to recur when people who lack lived experience of an issue seek to help those whose lives are inherently shaped by it. And one of these dynamics, as Chapter 5 will unpack, is that the people who are trying to help instead end up centring themselves in the struggles they're fighting. So this book could look like yet another centring of a privileged viewpoint.

Haven't we had enough of those? But I am not speaking from my own viewpoint because I have failed to realise that there is a world beyond me. My intention is not to centre myself for the sake of it or because I assume it's the natural thing to do. I have thought deeply about the evident tension that runs through my use of my own story in order, ultimately, to de-centre myself. I am writing about my own position as a form of taking responsibility, and because telling our own stories can sometimes have the

profoundest effect. The entanglements that come with a viewpoint like mine speak precisely to a key problem that this book addresses, namely, the limitations of trying to change the world from a position of entangled privilege. When I first embarked on my enquiry into the 'inner life' of activism, I wasn't anticipating that this question of my own starting point would run through so many of the other questions I was exploring. Sure, I had some concerns about the naming-and-shaming, policy-fixing activism I had been doing, and I was curious to explore if others perhaps shared them too. But the more I heard from people who were drawn to activism for reasons different to mine, the clearer it became that I couldn't just speak about 'activism' as if it were something that existed independently of my own – or indeed, anyone else's – particular experience of it. I would have to become aware of my own starting point and observe how it is entangled in relation with others' starting points. Yet precisely because whiteness had shielded me from probing into the implications and complicity of my own position, I wasn't accustomed to doing so. I felt shame in realising this, but shame was also the seed that would develop into a sense of responsibility.

Here is what my starting point looked like, once I looked at it really and truly. There are things I share with the majority of those in power. When I say 'in power' I do not only mean the power of government, political decision-making and the judiciary. The real power in the UK is now financialised capital and its owners, who control politics through their donations and the media through direct ownership, and whose true ownership of land, assets and companies is still hidden in tax haven secrecy.[11] What I share with any of these people, or their quotidian enforcers in government departments or senior editorial positions, is not an upper-class form of entitlement, that sense of being born to rule. But I was educated and raised with an unquestioned assumption that if I worked hard there was no reason I couldn't aspire towards ruling. My grandmother left school at 14 to work in a shop; Mum, with her enormous capabilities, left school at 16 to train as a secretary. Dad had a degree, worked in marketing for a publisher and then set up his own management consultancy. I was sent to a private school. I used to prefer to say 'on a scholarship', which wasn't untrue, but it obscured the further truth that my parents would probably have paid the fees if I hadn't won that award. The ambient feeling both at school and at home was that I had choices. This wasn't politically explicit; there was no

discussion of the gains of 1970s feminism that had put such a gap between my mother's experiences and my own, let alone of the possibility that any of my beckoning opportunities had anything to do with class and race privilege rather than random luck and my parents' striving. (Nor was there any talk about any aspect of ongoing patriarchy. I knew that Mum had been repeatedly propositioned and groped at work in the sixties, and when I started work in the late nineties I quickly learned which male journalists were NSIT: Not Safe in Taxis. I learned which senior editor liked to play power games with me that I didn't observe him engaging in with any young male reporters, and that made me uncomfortable in ways that I couldn't begin at the time to articulate. In my largely unpolitical family and the largely unfeminist nineties, this wasn't patriarchy, though, it was just how some men are.)

So I share, with many of those who rule, my whiteness, a Cambridge degree and the friends in influential jobs that came with it, and the ability to turn up the volume on my RP accent and pass as one of them, all of which are forms of access to power. That traineeship I did at *The Times* is the same one that Boris Johnson got sacked from a decade earlier for making up a quote. A clever up-and-coming journalist called Michael Gove sat on the news desk, near my lowly hot-desk in the reporters' pool. The current editor of the right-wing magazine the *Spectator*, Fraser Nelson, was another ambitious junior reporter. If I had chosen to stay on that path, who knows, perhaps I might have been in some form of power, not needling at it from NGOs on the 'outside'. (I am putting 'outside' in quote marks because from many perspectives, an NGO *is* part of the elite.) I chose not to stay on that path. I chose not to try to find a similar job when I recovered from the chronic fatigue I developed while doing it. I didn't want to administrate the existing systems of power because I thought there was something wrong with them. But I always felt the equal of those who did. Let's leave aside, for now, the way that sentence betrays my adoption of a status-driven frame that says such achievements are necessary for 'equality' with those in power, when really we are all equal in human worth whatever job we do. Nonetheless, that feeling of equal status felt helpful, as a campaigner, in obtaining access to the rooms where those in power gather; to senior journalists; to the offices of senior people in banks and multinationals.

I had some access to power, then: both practically, in the form of contacts or the ability to track them down, and in my mind, in the sense of feeling entitled to be in communication with them. As described in Chapter 1, my initial response to realising the limitations of my activism was despair and overwhelm. Once I began looking deeper, I felt that inner surge of energy that comes when, with my activist's nose, I feel I might be sniffing out a story: something that needs attention. I would say to former colleagues, 'Hey everyone, there's something wrong with our activism! We're trying to change rules and policies while replicating the methods that created them, and without looking at the attitudes and perceptions that created them: surely we need to look deeper, including at our inner lives?' When I began to interview other activists, however, I noticed something. The campaigners I spoke to who were white were saying, 'Yes! You're really onto something here, I've been feeling that too.' And the campaigners of colour were saying things like, 'You're not wrong. The policy change we need doesn't work on its own … but come on, this isn't new: *of course* there is something wrong with the way an oppressor culture frames things. You're catching up, not realising something that is *new*.'

My implicit sense of what I had shared with those in power, that gave me access to some of the people in power even though I disagreed with their worldview, had obscured the ways in which I saw the world in the same ways as them. I was too embedded in the dominant culture to see what those on the outside of hegemonic systems have been able to see more clearly. I was entangled in power, and was now starting to see that being closer to power affects how we think it can be changed. Whiteness is one form of privilege, and there are others that I have benefited from, particularly class. This might be a different book if I were working class, or if my experience of activism were in trade unions or party politics rather than middle-class NGOs (and there will be parallels and differences between the forms that activist entanglement takes in these environments). But it was by starting to wake up to whiteness, in particular, that I started to perceive my entanglement in power. The latest reckoning with privilege is well underway, in #MeToo, and in a new generation of anti-racist activism. Yet not enough of the reckoning, which is so very overdue, is yet being done by those who have benefited from privilege. The work should not have to be done by those who have borne the burden so others could

live in unwitting comfort. By sharing my experience of coming to see how my own entanglements have affected my activism, I hope that among the activists I touch will be people who have approached activism from similar positions to my own.

This matters because more people are now turning to activism, including people who have benefited most from intersecting forms of privilege like being white and middle class. People I've known for 25 years who have never done activism of any kind are now getting involved. They are motivated to act out of horror at the numbers of people who have been made homeless and who are dying on the streets of Britain. They are becoming activists because they see children lying on hospital floors as a decade of austerity continues to shred the social fabric, and as life is turned upside down by the Covid-19 pandemic. But from what I have observed, they are also doing so out of fear for themselves and their families: as generational inequality turns notions of generational progress on its head; as neoliberal capitalism starts to eat away at long-assumed middle-class comfort;[12] as the drawbridges of Brexit limit their children's futures; as mendacious authoritarianism takes hold; as ecological breakdown and climate change threaten everything. They are turning to activism as activists fighting for their lives, even while they maintain many of the assumptions of activists who are trying to help threatened others. One of these assumptions, for example, is that 'fighting for our lives' is anything new. An American climate activist, Mary Annaïse Heglar, expressed her frustration at white environmentalists describing climate breakdown as the first 'existential' threat, in a blog post headed with a photograph of two lynched Black men hanging from a tree with a crowd of laughing white people below. For Black people in America, she was having to point out, an existential threat to life has always been present.[13] Unexamined assumptions that come with whiteness have been endemic in the environmental movement, and are just one deep entanglement in existing structures of power.